

B I L L WR 21 940/28

FOR THE MORE EFFECTUALLY PREVENTING SEDITIOUS MEETINGS AND ASSEMBLIES.

What the Bill is falsely said to do, by Messrs. GREGORY and THRELWALL, FOX, and DUKE of BEDFORD, the WHIG CLUB, and the CORRESPONDING SOCIETY.

I. With respect to calling a Meeting, it has been said that the Bill prevents all Meetings for Petitioning upon Public Grievances; and as a proof of this, it is asserted, that either previous license from the Magistrate must be obtained, or that specific notice must be given to the Magistrate himself.

II. With respect to the Power of dispersing Seditious Meetings, it can hardly be said that any decided Objection has hitherto been made: it has only been stated, that the Magistrate has, under the existing Laws, sufficient power to disperse any Meeting of this nature; and that the Government may ensure the Peace of the Metropolis, by taking proper Precautions in calling out an Armed Force.

III. The only Objection made to the remaining Provisions of the Bill, is, that they restrain the Freedom of Conversation in Private Families.

What the Bill does, and what it does not do.

I. It does not prevent any Meeting upon Public Grievances; it does not apply at all to any Meeting called by a Lord Lieutenant, Custos Rotulorum, Sheriff, or by Justices of the Peace, or any Magistrates of Corporate Towns; it does not therefore apply to any Meeting by which the Petitions of the People have usually and legally been conveyed to any branch of any Legislature; and even with respect to all other Meetings, it does not require any previous permission from the Magistrate, but only such notice, by Public Advertisement, as may enable well disposed Persons to prevent Riot or Disorder, or any Misrepresentation of their Opinion, and may give the Magistrate the opportunity of taking due Precautions for the preservation of the Public Peace.

II. It is true, that the subsisting Laws, particularly the Riot Act, passed soon after the Accession of the House of BRUNSWICK, contained many strong Regulations for preserving the Peace of the Country, and that it has always been the wisdom of our Ancestors, to amend and enforce these Acts according to the exigency of the Times. The last mentioned Act gave new and discretionary powers to the Magistrates, suited to that occasion; and it proves, that the Parliament of that day, thought they could not better establish and perpetuate the Liberties of the Country, than by guarding against any Meeting injurious to the Public Peace.

The Riot Act may not apply in definite terms (and how could it be expected to do so?) to a Meeting of Persons calling themselves ENGLISHMEN, but aiming at the Subversion of the whole of the English Constitution, in order deliberately to introduce the modern Revolutionary Principles of France, even when, from the fatal experience of their Effects, they have been already renounced in that devoted Country.

The Bill now pending, gives to the Magistrate the power of dispersing Meetings assembled for the Purpose or under, the pretext, of deliberating upon Public Grievances, only in case that they should be assembled without the notice required, or that Proceedings should be had, or Discourses wilfully and advisedly held, for the purpose of inciting and stirring up the People to hatred or contempt of HIS MAJESTY, or of the CONSTITUTION; or that such Meetings should, by reason of special circumstances, become dangerous to the Public Peace, in the judgment of two or more Magistrates. In any of these cases, the Magistrates are enabled to enforce their determination precisely as they have done under the provisions of the Riot Act, ever since the year 1715.

Does any man think, that this Remedy is not now necessary? Does any Man think, that without it we should not soon be exposed to an arduous struggle for the Liberty and Property of the peaceable Householders of LONDON and of the rest of the Kingdom—for the Right itself of Petitioning, and all the Privileges and Blessings which we enjoy under our present happy Constitution?

III. The Bill does not contain one word, which has the least relation to any Meeting in any private Family whatever.

But the Provisions of the Bill, do enable the Magistrate to exercise regular Authority for dispersing those Meetings where Money is received for Admission, and which are known to have been employed for the purpose of delivering, in the form of Political Lectures and Discourses, Doctrines and Principles such as never had been heard before, but in the Jacobin Club in France.

ON THE WHOLE

The Question is, Will you Countenance and Protect the Introduction of French Principles, with the Poverty, Anarchy, Bloodshed, and Desolation which attend them—Or will you maintain, by a Law founded on the practice of your Ancestors, the Security of Property, the impartial Administration of Justice, the enjoyment of the utmost degree of rational Liberty, the Encouragement of useful Industry, of Manufactures, and of Commerce, which are the natural and necessary result of a Free and well-regulated Government?